

HABITATS OF BOUGAINVILLE COLEOPTERA, PART II

by Barry D. Valentine

According to the distribution given by W. Horn in Coleopterorum Catalogus, about nine genera of Cicindelidae should occur in the Solomon Islands. At least Three of the nine can be found in the thick jungle areas of Bougainville. These genera, Tricondyla, Therates, and Cicindela are quite interesting as they have very distinct habits and do not intermingle.

Tricondyla is the most unusual looking and is quite common. From a distance it looks like a large ant. It is large - about one inch long, apterous with conate elytra and is black with red legs. They can be found running along the trunks, branches, and twigs of small trees and bushes and very rarely on the ground. I've never seen these tiger beetles on weeds or other soft-stemmed plants and the only times they venture out upon the leaves of the trees in which they live are when they are pursuing prey or trying to escape enemies. These insects have the typical cicindelid habit of crouching and remaining motionless when alarmed. When one tries to pick them up, they dodge around the branch and appear on the other side - sometimes hanging upside down, but always alert and ready to run.

The genus Therates is found closer to the ground than Tricondyla - either on the jungle floor or on low growing leaves and weeds. It is easily distinguished from other tiger beetles by its fourth tarsal segment which is deeply emarginate and bilobed. Two species of this genus were taken and, except when disturbed, they were never seen more than three feet above the ground. They fly from leaf to leaf and are almost impossible to catch without a net. When disturbed, they seldom fly more than a few feet, but they take off again at the least disturbance. Therates basalis Dej. is unmistakable in the jungle. The pronotum is iridescent violet, while the bases of the elytra are yellow and the apices shiny black. The other species is less common but easier to catch. It is larger and has no yellow on the elytra. The two insects fly together and are most abundant during the heat of the day - particularly after a light rain.

Only two species of Cicindela were taken, but I am sure there are many others. The only specimen of one species was taken at light. The other species is represented by five specimens which were taken around the muddy edges of shell holes and bomb-craters in open sun-light. They are quite small - 8 mm. and very active. I have no idea what their natural habitat is as I've never seen an open muddy area in the jungle which wasn't caused by man. There are no large animals on Bougainville which might make wallows, so the only possibility I can imagine is that these beetles live on the banks of rivers and streams. Except for the one day when I found my five specimens, this species of Cicindela was never collected in the year which I spent on Bougainville.

(To be continued)